No dates have been suggested or fixed for a visit by Prime Minister to Washington. Any such visit will materialise when mutually convenient for India and the US.

Streamlining the issue of passports

2802. SHRI MENTAY PADMANABHAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what are the major hurdles in streamlining the issue of passport all over the country;

(b) whether the passport applications will be simplified; and

(c) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATTA): (a) to (c) The major constraints in issuing passports with a minimum of delay are shortage of staff, procedural bottlenecks and infrastructural problems. Steps are being taken to simplify the passport application form through reduction in the number of pages and consolidation of the information required.

Restriction over foreign media

2803. MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the repeated false allegations by the Pakistan Government about restrictions on the visits and functioning of foreign media in the Kashmir valley;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(e) what action Government have taken|propose to take in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA (a) and (b) As a pan of its disinformation campaign. Pakistan has been alleging that members of the international media cannot visit Jammu & Kashmir freely.

(c) Government have and will take all steps to inorw the international community that there are no restrictions on visits of foreign media to Jammu & Kashmir and to emphasise the open and transparent nature of our democratic functioning. In fact, more than 150 foreign journalists visited J & K in the last year.

Government constantly endeavour to counter the false and motivated Pakistani propaganda directed against India and to apprise world opinion of the situation in J&K.

Indian workers in Iraqi Jails

2804. SHRI N. E. BALARAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that some of the Indian workers in Kuwait were caught by Iraqi military personnel during the Gulf-war and are put in "Abu Garib" Jail in Baghdad;

(b) if so, what are the names of such Indian Prisoners of war suffering in Iraqi Jails; and

(c) what steps are being taken for their release?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) At present no Indian nationals who were arrested during the Gulf-war by Iraqi authorities are lodged in "Abu Garib" jail in Baghdad.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.